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ABSTRACT

In 1996, Itawamba Community College (Mississippi) participated in the American Association of Community Colleges' Exploring America's Communities project, which works to strengthen the teaching and learning of American history, literature, and cultue at U.S. community colleges. The primary goal of the college's action plan is to enhance instruction about American pluralism and identity by acquiring video and print materials; implementing curricular changes in American Literature, American History, and Honors courses; and establishing a Multicultural Speakers Forum. In the revised English course, students analyzed American literature by responding to questions about the American identity and about unity of, divisions between, and common ground among various American populations. This revised course will be offered state-wide on the Mississippi Community College network in the spring of 1997. Curricular changes in an honors seminar involved studies of American Indians through videos, readings, and guest speakers. The issues of identity covered in the coursework were addressed from a national perspective in a Multicultural Speakers Forum, in which the American Indian, Afro-American, Mexican-American, and Asian American cultures were represented. The American History course was revised and acquired new materials to address the program's themes about American identity. No specific obstacles or problems have been encountered and student responses to the questions were particularly gratifying. (HAA)

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Itawamba Community College
Exploring America's Communities
Progress Report

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In: National Conference on American Pluralism and Identity Program Book
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Established in 1948, Itawamba Community College is a comprehensive two-year public institution serving students in five counties including Chickasaw, Itawamba, Lee, Monroe, and Pontotoc in rural Northeast Mississippi. The main campus is located in Fulton, Mississippi, with the vocational and technical complex in the nearby city of Tupelo, Mississippi approximately twenty miles from the main campus. The 1996 Itawamba enrollment includes 3493 credit and 3417 non-credit students.

The College subscribes to the philosophy that the mission of the community college is to bring the concept of "educational opportunities for all" closer to reality. Its goal is to provide educational opportunities of the highest quality through academic, vocational-technical, and personal enrichment programs. Students have an opportunity to pursue a two-year college parallel Associate of Arts degree, a two-year technical Associate of Applied science degree, or an Occupational Vocational certificate. The College is accredited by the Mississippi Association of Community-Junior colleges and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

The primary goals of Itawamba Community College's Action Plan to enhance teaching and learning about American pluralism and identity include acquiring of video and print materials, implementing curricular changes in American Literature, American History, and Honors, and establishing a Multicultural Speakers Forum. The Team has made steady progress in accomplishing these goals. Our library is brimming with new

video and print acquisitions detailing the American Indian, Afro-American, and Latino experience in the United States. In addition, revised curricula in ENG 2223--American Literature I--and HUM 1913--Honors Seminar I--were piloted first semester.

Students in ENG 2223 began the semester by responding to the four questions--What does it mean to be an American? What divides us? What brings us together? What do we have in common?--on a personal level. Throughout the semester they applied the four questions to the works of twenty-five authors from the Colonial, Revolutionary, and Renaissance Periods. Finally, at the end of the semester, students combined their own thoughts on American pluralism and identity with those of the acknowledged masters of American Literature they had read and discussed. This course will be offered state-wide on the Mississippi Community College Network second semester.

Curricular changes in Honors Seminar I arose from the choice of the study topic--Native Americans. Students began the semester by viewing and discussing videos which presented both romantic and realistic portraits of American Indians. As the focus narrowed, students learned more about the Indians of the Southeast--especially the tribes of Mississippi--through videos, reading, and guest speakers. The semester ended with the study of Leslie Marmon Silko's CEREMONY, a contemporary American Indian classic. Honors Seminar II (HUM 1913) will explore the Afro-American culture.

Itawamba Community College's Project mentor, Dr. David Trask, kicked off our Multicultural Speakers Forum during his site visit October 2, 1996, by addressing the four questions from a national perspective. Dr. Trask also met with four of the five other

speakers in the Forum--Mrs. Patrialia Greenwood Cox, representing the American Indian culture; Judge Barry Ford, representing the Afro-American culture; Ms. Josephine Rayborn, representing the Mexican-American culture; and, Mr. Robert Ring, representing the Asian-American culture. The other Forum speaker, Dr. William Ferris from the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at The University of Mississippi, will provide the Southern perspective during his presentation scheduled for Tuesday, January 21, 1997, at 7:00 p.m. The other four presentations will follow during the Spring 1997 and the Fall 1997 semesters.

Following the retirement of Itawamba Community College's longtime American History instructor, Mr. Bill Mattison was chosen to revise the American History I curriculum and pilot it during the Spring 1997 semester. Consequently, Mr. Mattison has spent first semester acquiring material and restructuring the course to include the four questions.

Although accomplishing our goals has been tiring and time-consuming at times, the Team has not encountered any specific obstacles or special problems. We have essentially done, or are in the process of doing, everything we said we would do. Both print and videos materials have been purchased and put in place, curricula for American Literature, American History, and Honors Seminar I and II have been revamped. The Multicultural Speakers Forum is well underway.

Student response to the four questions has been particularly gratifying. Students who attended Dr. Trask's address in October entered into an enthusiastic dialogue which lasted late into the evening. The written responses from the American Literature class indicated

thoughtful reflection as well as a true appreciation for American pluralism and identity. Consider one young man's impassioned responses to this question--What brings us together?

> There have always been seeds of division in society and it is extremely unlikely that the scars of more than 200 years of strife will heal overnight. But while this may sound as though there is no hope for a united America, there is. What brings us together? It sometimes takes a catastrophic event. A hurricane. A flood. A wildfire. A disease. A war. A death. It seems that any time an event that touches human emotions occurs, the people of America have the ability to look past the divisions we face and, or a moment, dwell totally on joining together to support a common goal. When the baby fell down a well in Texas, it didn't matter what color she was or if her parents were members of a certain church or social status. What mattered to every single person in the country was the welfare of a child who had the potential to become a productive member of society. When the space shuttle exploded 73 second into flight on the morning of January

28, 1986, it didn't matter to John or Jane Q. Public that one of the astronauts who perished had an Asian background. What mattered was that seven individuals had given their lives for the nation. They set out on a mission of space exploration. What they did was complete a successful mission of uniting the citizens of this country in grieving the loss the families of those astronauts suffered.

Submitted by Dr. Betty Montgomery on December 16, 1996.